

## Unsung Women of the Civil Rights Movement

### Overview

History has often been remiss in overlooking the crucial leadership and contributions of women during the Civil Rights Movement, focusing instead on the more prominent male leaders. In this lesson, students will explore the important roles women played in the acquisition of civil rights as participants, organizers and leaders, particularly focusing on four examples: **Septima Clark, Ella Baker, Daisy Bates and Fannie Lou Hamer**. Through the examination of various readings, video clips and oral history interviews with and about these women, students will gain the understanding that without women, the Civil Rights Movement could not have been as successful. Students will culminate their understanding by writing ode poems about the women involved in the Civil Rights Movement.

### Essential/Compelling Questions

- In what ways did women contribute to political and social action and change during the Civil Rights Movement, both in leadership roles and as crucial participants?
- Why has the role of women leaders during the Civil Rights Movement often been overshadowed throughout history?

### Grades

8-12

### Materials

- Accompanying PowerPoint available (in PDF format) in Carolina K-12's Database of K-12 Resources at <https://k12database.unc.edu/files/2018/01/UnsungWomenPPT.pdf>
  - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click "View" in the top menu bar of the file, and select "Full Screen Mode"
  - Teachers are encouraged to edit the PPT's information to best meet their particular learning objectives. For an editable version of the PPT, email Carolina K-12 at [CarolinaK12@unc.edu](mailto:CarolinaK12@unc.edu) with the title of the PowerPoint in the subject line.
  - The lesson procedure notes additional information as well as numerous potential discussion questions to accompany each slide.
- "Women Had Key Roles in Civil Rights Movement, but Few Achieved Prominence with Public," article attached
- "Unsung Women of the Civil Rights Movement," guiding worksheet attached
- Transcripts for interview excerpts for Daisy Bates and Ella Baker, attached
- Lyrics to "Ella's Song," attached and access to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6Uus--gFrc> for playing the song
- Create an Ode to the Women of the Civil Rights Movement, assignment sheet attached
  - Students will need paper and three colors of ink or markers for the assignment brainstorm, as written
- **Additional Resource:** See also the lesson "Pauli Murray: Civil & Women's Rights Trailblazer" for related content regarding women and the Civil Rights Movement; available in Carolina K-12's Database of K-12 Resources at <https://k12database.unc.edu/files/2018/01/PauliMurray.pdf> or by sending a request to [CarolinaK12@unc.edu](mailto:CarolinaK12@unc.edu).

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## Student Preparation

Students should possess a basic understanding of the Civil Rights Movement. Teachers may want to assign the attached “Women Had Key Roles in Civil Rights Movement, Despite Never Achieving Public Prominence” as a homework reading prior to implementing this lesson.

## Teacher Preparation

Teachers should predetermine which method of instruction they will use for students to learn about the four civil rights leaders this lesson focuses on, then set up their class and/or edit the accompanying PPT and guiding worksheet accordingly. (See p. 3 for ideas including rotating stations, a jigsaw, partners, or whole class.)

## Duration

Varies (with a minimum of 60 minutes), depending on how many of the four civil rights leaders that teachers choose to include in their instruction, as well as how the instruction is implemented (i.e., stations, jigsaw, partners, or whole class.)

## Procedure

### Introducing the Role of Women in the Civil Rights Movement

1. As a warm-up, project [slide 2](#) of the accompanying Power Point and instruct students to answer the question posed in a “[Think-Pair-Share](#).” Let students know that they should (first individually, then together) work to generate a list of words, phrases, people, events, dates, etc. that reflect their existing knowledge of and associations with the Civil Rights Movement.
2. After providing students with time to generate their lists, ask partners to report out to the entire class. (This process not only serves as a lead-in to the lesson’s content, but also serves as a formative assessment/review of previous Civil Rights instruction and gives teachers a sense of where students are at.) As students share, compile their thoughts into a master list up front.
  - Optional Technological Enhancement: If the students have access to laptops, the teacher may want to create a shared Google Doc where the student pairs can type their list. When discussing, teachers can then project this compiled list and work to group similar responses together.
3. Once responses have waned, ask students to consider their list and whether they can identify any missing components. Have they overlooked any area? It is possible that student responses will either overlook or minimize the role of women in the Movement (with the exception perhaps of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott.) If this is the case, point this out to the class and discuss:
  - It seems that most of the people we’ve listed are men. Why is this the case? Why haven’t we highlighted more the important role of women in the Civil Rights Movement?
  - What do you already know about the role of women throughout the fight for civil rights?
4. Explain to the class that women played crucial roles in the Civil Rights Movement, both in planning and in execution, but that history often fails to acknowledge these important and ground-breaking contributions. Let students know that this lesson will focus on recognizing some of the women that played significant roles in the fight for civil rights.

### Women Had Key Roles in Civil Rights Movement, Despite Never Achieving Public Prominence

5. Provide the class with the attached introductory reading, “Women Had Key Roles in Civil Rights Movement, but Few Achieved Prominence with Public,” instructing them to carefully read and answer the corresponding questions. Options:

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- Students can read this article individually, in reading partners, or as a [Reciprocal Teaching Activity](#)
- Alternatively, teachers with limited class time can provide this reading as homework prior to the day the lesson is introduced. In this case, the warm-up would be a review of the reading and class discussion using the questions below, instead of the activity described in Steps 1-3.

6. After students have read and considered the questions, discuss as a class:

- What are some of the many ways women contributed to the Civil Rights Movement?
- Even though women played a major role in the Movement, why are their important contributions lesser known than male counterparts?
- How is the typical portrayal of Rosa Parks as differential incorrect? What might this one example teach us about the portrayal of women in the Movement overall?
- What does Julian Bond mean when he says, "There's a Chinese saying, 'Women hold up half the world...In the case of the civil rights movement it's probably three-quarters of the world'."
- (Project [slide 3](#) to share additional information about women during the March on Washington.) Have you ever thought about why there were no women speakers at the March on Washington, despite the fact that just as many women as men were involved behind the scenes?

7. Let students know that this lesson is about righting history's egregious wrong in failing to recognize the role of women in the Movement. Let students know they are going to be introduced to a handful of the thousands upon thousands of brave women who took action to fight for a better world through background information, readings, video clips, and perhaps most importantly, through the very own words of these women by listening to short excerpts of their oral histories from SOHP.

- If the class has not yet been exposed to oral history, ask students if any of them know what oral history is and call on volunteers to share any associations that come to mind. Project [slide 4](#) and provide an overview of oral history for the class.

#### **Septima Poinsette Clark | Ella Baker | Daisy Bates | Fannie Lou Hamer**

8. Teachers have multiple options for how to implement instruction on the four women the remainder of this lesson focuses on. Teachers can utilize the attached "Unsung Women of the Civil Rights Movement" guiding worksheet, which can be provided to each student, or one copy can be provided at each station. Students can answer the questions on notebook paper or electronically, and teachers are encouraged to edit/alter the guiding worksheet as they see fit. The accompanying PPT contains four segments with a multitude of information on each of these leaders. Teachers should determine whether their class time allows for exploring all four women or not, as well as which instruction option best suits their available resources and teaching time. Teachers are also encouraged to edit the materials provided in each PPT section as well as the attached guiding worksheet, "Unsung Women of the Civil Rights Movement," as needed. Ideas include:

- **Stations:** Set up the classroom into stations where students, in groups, explore the information about each woman independently. Groups should be around 4 students each, so if focusing on all four women, teachers may need to have 8 stations (2 stations for each civil rights leader) in order to keep groups smaller. Each station will also need at least one laptop connected to the internet, as well as headphones and a splitter or listening station so that several students can view and listen to the videos and audio together. (Teachers without access to headphones/splitters may want to reserve a larger space, such as the media center, so that students can listen through the laptop's speakers without disturbing other groups.) Each station should be labeled with the name of the woman focused on and the appropriate slides from the accompanying PPT should be cued up on the laptop. The PPT will lead students through learning some general information via the slides, as well as direct

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them to additional online readings, videos, oral histories, etc. to explore. Throughout several days of class, students will rotate through the four stations to learn about each person.

- **Jigsaw:** Set the class or media center up into groups in the same way as described above, with each group focused on one of the four women. Students in each group should be tasked with becoming an expert on the one civil rights leader they are assigned. They will then be divided into new mixed groups that contain at least 1-2 students who focused on each person. Students will then teach the others in their new group about the person who they learned about. All students should take notes as they listen and learn.
- **Partners:** For one-to-one schools or classrooms with access to enough laptops, students can work in partners to go through the PPT together. Teachers can have each set of partners focus on all four women, or on one or more of the teacher's choosing. If students are focusing on different people in their pairs, teachers should have partners report out to the class about what they learned in a whole class synthesizing discussion.
- **Whole Class/Teacher Led:** Teachers with limited time and/or technological resources can also choose to focus on one or more of these women and go through the coordinating PPT slides in a whole class lecture/discussion, having the students view/listen to any accompanying film clips or oral histories together, as it is projected/played up front. In this case, teachers can also print out any of the hyperlinked readings they want students to read independently.

9. For teacher reference, information about each civil rights leader can be found on the following slides of the accompanying Power Point:

- **Septima Clark:** [Slides 5-14](#)
- **Ella Baker:** [Slides 15-24](#)
  - Teachers should provide students with the attached transcript from the Ella Baker oral history interview to follow along with as they listen
- **Daisy Bates:** [Slides 25-30](#)
  - Teachers should provide students with the attached transcript from the Daisy Bates oral history interview to follow along with as they listen
- **Fannie Lou Hamer:** [Slides 31-38](#)
  - Teacher note: The article referenced on [slide 34](#) discusses how Fannie Lou Hamer's forced sterilization is what first inspired her to join the struggle for civil rights. Teachers who choose to assign this article as an independent reading should only do for classes with the maturity level to handle this sensitive issue and should also ensure students are properly prepped for this content.
  - For teachers who have students listen to Hamer's testimony at the Democratic National Convention (linked on [slide 35](#)), the class should be forewarned that there is a racial slur around the 5-minute mark. Explain the historical context in which it is used and ensure students understand the inappropriate use of such language today.

#### **Culminating Discussion & Activity: Women and the Civil Rights Movement**

10. After the class has completed the learning activities, allow students to report out on and synthesize their learning with a class discussion:

- What words/phrases would you use to describe the women you learned about today? (Teachers may want to document responses in a list at the front of the room.)
- Considering what and who you learned about, what did you find most interesting or surprising and why? Of the women you studied, who were you most impressed by and why?
- What is "activism" and in what ways were these women activists?

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- In what ways did women contribute to political and social action and change during the Civil Rights Movement, both in leadership roles and as crucial participants?
  - Why has the role of women leaders during the Civil Rights Movement often been overshadowed throughout history?
  - What can you infer about the male view of women at this time in America?
  - How did these women respond to the sexism that existed among the leadership of the Civil Rights Movement?
- 11.** Layer the quotes from slide 39 into the discussion. Teachers with time can have students partner up and examine one of the two quotes independently in a “Think, Pair, Share” activity, then report out to the class. Or, teachers can simply have the class discuss them both as a whole.
- What message regarding women are Kennedy and Bond making?
- 12.** Project slide 40 and allow students to share any final thoughts or questions.
- 13.** Tell students that they are going to now listen to a song written by Bernice Johnson Reagon in 1983 and performed by Sweet Honey in the Rock to celebrate Ella Baker. (The song is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6Uus--gFrc>. While the entire performance is 5 minutes, teachers can stop at around 3:30.) Provide students with the attached lyrics and project the instructions on slide 41:
- Follow along with the lyrics and mark the text as you listen.
  - Underline the words or phrases you feel are most powerful.
  - Write down any associations, thoughts, or connections to history or to society today that come to mind.
  - Sketch or describe in writing any images that come to mind as you listen.
  - Write down how the song makes you feel.
- 14.** After students have listened to the song, allow them to share their reactions and further discuss:
- Why do you think the song says that those who believe in freedom “cannot rest?”
  - What message is the song trying to convey in the verse “Until the killing of black men, black mothers' sons, Is as important as the killing of white men, white mothers' sons?” In what ways does this idea resonate in today’s society?
  - According to Ella’s Song, who has the power to make a change? Do you agree or disagree with her and why?
  - What parts of this song can you connect to specific things you’ve learned about Ella Baker? Which specific phrases relate to what you’ve learned about women in the Movement in general?
  - What do you think the purpose of this song was? Why did Reagon write it?
- 15.** Explain to the students that to culminate their learning, they will be creating their own ode poem celebrating the women of the Civil Rights Movement. Provide students with the attached assignment sheet and go over the details. Let students know that their ode can be about women and the Movement in general, or it can focus on one particular female civil rights leader of their choosing. Teachers should let students know when their final ode is due, as well as how it will be presented (i.e., teachers may want to have students share their work in small groups.)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Women Had Key Roles in Civil Rights Movement, but Few Achieved Prominence with Public

Ella Baker. Septima Poinsette Clark. Fannie Lou Hamer.

They and others risked their lives and worked tirelessly, demanding a social revolution — but history has often overlooked them. They were the women of the civil rights movement.

Though historians now acknowledge that women, particularly African-Americans, were pivotal in the critical battles for racial equality, Rosa Parks' death highlights the fact that she was one of the very few female civil rights figures who are widely known. Most women in the movement played background roles, either by choice or due to bias, since being a woman of color meant facing both racism and sexism.



Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer of speaks to Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party sympathizers outside the Capitol in 1965.

“In some ways it reflects the realities of the 1950s: There were relatively few women in public leadership roles,” said Julian Bond, a civil rights historian at the University of Virginia and chair of the NAACP. “So that small subset that becomes prominent in civil rights would tend to be men. But that doesn’t excuse the way some women have just been written out of history.”

For many, the wives of the movement’s prominent male leaders, including Coretta Scott King, Betty Shabazz and Myrlie Evers Williams, were among the most visible women in the struggle.

### Visible, but unsung

But scan historical images of the most dramatic moments of the civil rights movement — protesters blasted by fire hoses and dogs lunging at blacks — and women and girls are everywhere.

There is a 1964 image of Mississippi beautician Vera Piggy styling hair and educating her customers on voter registration. And there’s a 1963 photo of students at Florida A&M University, a historically black college, in which hundreds of people, mostly women, answer court charges for protesting segregated movie theaters. Six of the so-called Little Rock Nine, black teenagers whose lives were threatened when they integrated the Arkansas city’s high schools in 1957, were young women.

In 1955, Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white man in Montgomery, Ala., sparking a mass boycott by thousands, mainly black women domestic workers who had long filled the buses’ back seats. Immediately, black women activists who had for years urged city officials to integrate the buses rallied to her cause, said Lynne Olson, author of “Freedom’s Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970.”

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The women arranged car pools and sold cakes and pies to raise money for alternate transportation. The boycott lasted more than a year until the Supreme Court upheld a lower court's ruling in favor of four black Montgomery women who had — months before Parks — refused to comply with bus segregation.

### Men took the helm

Though women had spearheaded that campaign and many others, when their efforts began to bear fruit prominent men often took the helm, Olson said.

“After the bus boycott got going and (Martin Luther) King got involved, they wouldn't even let Rosa Parks speak at the first mass meeting,” she said. “She asked to speak, and one of the ministers said he thought she had done enough.”

Olson added that Parks is often depicted as a deferential woman who defied segregation laws at the urging of movement leaders, but in fact she had for years quietly pushed for racial justice — and she had carefully planned the actions that led to her arrest.

“She was not just a symbol,” Olson said. “She was an agent.”

In 1963, tens of thousands of women who joined the March on Washington witnessed a tribute to prominent women, songs by several women, and brief remarks by the entertainer Josephine Baker, but no woman made a speech. Countless women in the movement could have spoken:

- **Ella Baker** was a charismatic labor organizer and longtime leader in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. She believed the movement should not place too much emphasis on leaders.
- **Septima Poinsette Clark**, often called the “queen mother” of civil rights, was an educator and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People activist decades before the nation's attention turned to racial equality.
- **Fannie Lou Hamer**, a Mississippi sharecropper, was beaten and jailed in 1962 for trying to register to vote. She co-founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and gave a fiery speech at the 1964 Democratic National Convention.
- **Vivian Malone Jones** defied segregationist Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace to enroll in the University of Alabama in 1963 and later worked in the civil rights division of the U.S. Justice Department.

### Still unknown

But most women in the movement were not well-known — then or now, said Katherine J. Kennedy, director of Boston University's Howard Thurman Center, which organizes human rights programs on campus.

Most were “volunteers — women in the churches who cooked the meals and made sure all the preparations were made, the ones who cleaned up after the rallies and got ready for the next one,” Kennedy said. “Most women who are sincerely interested in making a difference are not looking for the publicity for it. ... Making a true difference doesn't always come with fanfare.”

Even today, Bond said most NAACP members and most local branch presidents are women.



Bertha Gilbert, 22, is led away by police after she tried to enter a segregated lunch counter in Nashville, Tenn., in 1964.

“There’s a Chinese saying, ‘Women hold up half the world,’” Bond said. “In the case of the civil rights movement it’s probably three-quarters of the world.”

Source: [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/9862643/ns/us\\_news-life/t/women-had-key-roles-civil-rights-movement/#.Wclbhsa1st0](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/9862643/ns/us_news-life/t/women-had-key-roles-civil-rights-movement/#.Wclbhsa1st0)

**Consider and answer:**

1. What are some of the many ways women contributed to the Civil Rights Movement?
2. Even though women played a major role in the Movement, why do you think their important contributions lesser known than male counterparts?
3. How is the typical portrayal of Rosa Parks as differential incorrect? What might this one example teach us about the portrayal of women in the Movement overall?
4. What does Julian Bond mean when he says, “There’s a Chinese saying, ‘Women hold up half the world...In the case of the civil rights movement it’s probably three-quarters of the world.”

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Group Members: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Unsung Women of the Civil Rights Movement**

With your group you will learn about some of the incredible yet lesser known women leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. Follow the instructions at each center or provided to you by your teacher and answer the following questions.

#### **Septima Clark**

**Watch the 2 min. video overview about Septima Clark at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEnFNbJrfmY> then discuss and answer:**

1. What was unique about the Highlander Folk School where she taught and why did this make it a target?
2. What were Citizenship Schools?
3. What impact did the subsequent Citizenship Education Program's impact?
4. What does D. Michael Clark mean when he says "Without Septima Poinsette, you have no Martin Luther King - you have no Rosa Parks - you don't have a President Obama..."?
5. Based on this overview, what are your first impressions of Clark?

**After reviewing the PowerPoint slides, discuss and answer:**

6. What important contributions to the fight for civil rights did Septima Clark make?
7. Why do you think Septima Clark valued education so much?
8. What did she mean when she said "Knowledge could empower marginalized groups in ways that formal legal equality could not"?

**Listen to the one-minute clip in which Septima Poinsette Clark discusses the sexism that existed in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) at <https://soundcloud.com/sohp/unsung-women-1-septima-clark-on-sexism> . Discuss & answer:**

9. Why does Reverend Abernathy continually question Clark's position on the SCLC board?
10. Does her account surprise you? Why or why not?
11. What does she mean when she says "We live in a man's made world..."? Do you think this holds true today? Why or why not?

#### **Ella Baker**

**To peak your interest about Ella Baker, VIEW the 2 minute clip below, in which Dr. Cornell West speaks about Ella Baker: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omyQ6P2SCzo> Discuss and answer:**

12. Why does Dr. West say there is no civil rights movement without Ella Baker?
13. How does he describe her?

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14. Dr. West says, "People lead in a lot of different ways." In what ways does Dr. West classify Ella Baker as an incredible leader, despite there not being famous speeches we remember her for? How does this leadership style differ than Dr. Luther King, Jr.?

**After reviewing the PowerPoint slides, discuss and answer:**

15. What do you think Ella Baker meant when she said "the movement made Martin, and not Martin the movement"? How does this illustrate her belief in collective leadership?
16. Based on what you have learned thus far, what words/phrases would you use to describe Ella Baker?

**LISTEN closely to the excerpt as Ella Baker speaks about women and leadership in the movement. (Pause at 1:50.)** <https://soundcloud.com/sohp/unsung-women-2-ella-baker-on-women-in-the-movement>

17. How does Ella Baker describe the role of women in the movement?

**Listen to the one-minute interview of Septima Clark discussing Ella Baker's view of the male leadership. (Pause after 1:07, "...but no one was going to listen to her.")** <https://soundcloud.com/sohp/unsung-women-3-septima-clark-on-ella-baker>

18. Jot down any words, phrases, or feelings that may have come to mind based on the interview's content while listening.
19. What issues did Ella Baker have with some of the choices SCLC was making and why?

**Ella Baker said: "Strong people don't need strong leaders."**

20. Based on what you've now learned about Ella Baker, discuss with your group what this quotation means.
21. Rewrite the quotation in your own words without changing its meaning.

### **Daisy Bates**

**As an introduction to Daisy Bates, listen to the 2:23 min. excerpt** <https://soundcloud.com/sohp/unsung-women-4-daisy-bates> . **Answer:**

22. What does Bates say prepared her for her participation and activism in the Civil Rights Movement?
23. Why does Bates say she's been angry her whole life?
24. How does Bates characterize her childhood interactions with white people?
25. What does her father encourage Bates to do with her anger?
26. How would you describe Bates' tone of voice in the interview? What does this tone reveal to the listener about her life experiences?

**Read "Daisy Bates and the Little Rock Nine"**

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14563865> and answer:

27. What does Ernest Green, one of the Little Rock Nine, mean when he says "Daisy Bates was the poster child of black resistance. She was a quarterback, the coach. We were the players..."?

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28. What specific examples throughout the article illustrate the ways in which Daisy Bates impacted civil rights?
29. What did Daisy Bates risk in her role as a civil rights leader?

**Watch the clip one-minute video clip, “A Civil Rights Hero Who Put Her Life on the Line,” at <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/videos/a-civil-rights-hero-who-put-her-life-on-the-line/>.**

**Answer:**

30. The clip opens with Mrs. Bates saying, “If you are fighting for the rights of man, you are never free from fear. I never know when they are going to pass here and blow this house to bits...we still get threatening telephone calls...the hate mail...but nevertheless, I feel if I’m going to live in this town and live with myself I must oppose hatred and prejudice in any way that I can.” How would you describe her based on this quote and film clip and everything else you have learned?

### **Fannie Lou Hamer**

**As you prepare to learn about Fannie Lou Hamer, consider this quote from her: “Sometimes it seem like to tell the truth today is to run the risk of being killed. But if I fall, I'll fall five feet four inches forward in the fight for freedom. I'm not backing off.”**

31. What first impressions do these words give you regarding her spirit and character?

**Find out what happened when Hamer showed up to register & learn about her life’s work by reading the article at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/freedomsummer-hamer/>.** Answer:

32. Why do you think Hamer sang spirituals on the bus as it was held unjustly by the police?
33. Why was Hamer seen as a potential leader among local SNCC organizers?
34. Why was poverty an important civil rights issue for Hamer to tackle, alongside voting rights and desegregation?
35. What risks and repercussions did Hamer face based on her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement?
36. What was Hamer’s involvement with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP)?
37. How did Hamer get the attention of the President at the time, President Lyndon Johnson?

**Find out what happened when Hamer showed up to register & learn about her life’s work by reading the article at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/freedomsummer-hamer/>**

38. This ends with Hamer stating, “All of this is on account of we want to register, to become first-class citizens. And if the Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America. Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, where we have to sleep with our telephones off the hooks because our lives be threatened daily, because we want to live as decent human beings, in America?” Why is she questioning America and what in particular is she questioning?

**Throughout her activist work, Fannie Lou Hamer became known as the “lady who sings the hymns,” since she would sing Negro spirituals to bolster the resolve of the civil rights activists. Listen to her sing at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxRfT12Sojw> and answer:**

39. What images come to mind as you listen to Mrs. Hamer sing? How does the song make you feel?
40. Why do you think songs like this were an important part of the Civil Rights Movement?

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Listen to the interview with civil rights leader Julian Bond, in which he discusses Fannie Lou Hamer (1:46)

<https://soundcloud.com/sohp/unsung-women-5-julian-bond-on-fannie-hamer>

41. As you listen, take notes on how Bond describes Hamer.
42. What were her beliefs and how did she differ from other leaders in the Movement?
43. Does the particular way Julian Bond describes Hamer (particularly in the beginning of his comments) say anything about the way women were viewed by males in the Movement?

**“I guess if I’d had any sense, I’d have been a little scared - but what was the point of being scared? The only thing they could do was kill me, and it kinda seemed like they’d been trying to do that a little bit at a time since I could remember.”**

44. What is Fannie Lou Hamer’s attitude about fear, and what does this attitude tell you about her life experiences?

**Excerpt from the Oral History Interview transcript of Ella Baker - Southern Oral History Program**

September 4, 1974

*Interviewer: Eugene Walker*

*Transcribed by: Frances Tamburro*

Ella Baker: "But they couldn't tolerate having an old lady, even a lady, and an old lady at that. It was too much for the masculine and ministerial ego to have permitted that." (Laughing) "There you are."

Eugene Walker: "You show great insight in this period I've been looking over. You may call it hindsight but it seems to me that you knew what was going on. You made some recommendations to the S.C.L.C. over some long range things you felt they should do. Two things you felt they should do in particular, namely: trying to create a program where they could get more women involved in the movement and try to come up with some program to try and get more of the youth involved in the movement. This was before the Greensboro thing. I regard this as being of a great deal of insight. What was it you had seen which made you realize at that point in time that women and youth would eventually be playing vital rolls or they should be included at that point in time in trying to bring about whatever social change was taking place?"

Baker: "I guess my own experience but basically in terms of the church. All of the churches depended in terms of things taking place. It was women, not men. Men didn't do the things that had to be done and you had a large number of women who were involved in the bus boycott. They were the people who kept the spirit going and the young people."

**Excerpt from the Oral History Interview transcript of Daisy Bates - Southern Oral History Program**

October 11, 1976

*Interviewer: Elizabeth Jacoway*

*Transcribed by: Jean Houston*

Elizabeth Jacoway: "what were the factors that prepared you to step forward in a role of leadership at the time of the Little Rock crisis? What do you think in your background prepared you to play a leadership role in that crisis?"

Daisy Bates: "Well, I think I've been angry all my life about what has happened to my people.

*[Tape repaired] /Mrs. Bates refers here to the rape and murder of her mother by a group of white men*

finding that out, and nobody did anything about it. I think it started back then."

EJ: "In your book you entitled that chapter 'Rebirth'"

Bates: "Yes."

EJ: " And the heritage from your father was a rebirth of your attitudes, wasn't it?"

Bates: "It was, because before that time I don't remember ever—after my childhood friend and I broke up—I don't think I ever spoke to a white person. There was a white sheriff who used to come and visit my father. I liked him. Well, if he'd come by he'd say, "Is your Daddy here?" I'd just turn and say, "Daddy, that man is out there." I couldn't even speak to any of them, because I couldn't."

EJ: "Cause you were so ..."

Bates: "I was so tight inside. There was so much hate. And I think it started then without my knowing it. It prepared me, it gave me the strength to carry this out."

EJ: "But when your father lay dying, he encouraged you to channel all that anger into..."

Bates: "Into something creative. I did that for some time. I think I'm still doing it now in a very small way. And I will always remember what he told me But really I don't think anything prepared me more than my anger."

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*This lesson plan was completed in collaboration with teacher Beth Lowry as part of the 2017 Carolina Oral History Teaching Fellows Program in Civil Rights, sponsored by UNC-Chapel Hill's [Southern Oral History Program](#) and [Carolina K-12](#).*

## ***Ella's Song***

by Bernice Johnson Reagon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6Uus--gFrc>

We who believe in freedom cannot rest  
We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes

Until the killing of black men, black mothers' sons  
Is as important as the killing of white men, white mothers' sons

Refrain

The older I get the better I know that the secret of my going on  
Is when the reins are in the hands of the young, who dare to run against the storm  
To me young people come first  
They have the courage where we fail  
And if I can but shed some light as they carry us through the gale

Refrain

Struggling myself don't mean a whole lot, I've come to realize  
That teaching others to stand up and fight is the only way my struggle survives  
I'm a woman who speaks in a voice and I must be heard  
At times I can be quite difficult, I'll bow to no man's word

Refrain

Not needing to clutch for power  
Not needing the light just to shine on me  
I need to be one in the number as we stand against tyranny

Refrain

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Create an Ode to the Women of the Civil Rights Movement

History has often been remiss in overlooking the crucial leadership and contributions of women during the Civil Rights Movement, focusing instead on male leadership. Yet, numerous women not only participated in the Movement, but served as prominent organizers and leaders, without whom, the Civil Rights Movement could not have been as successful. To highlight and celebrate the women of the Civil Rights Movement and their brave, strategic activism, you will create an **ode**: a lyrical poem that praises and glorifies an event or individual that is sometimes sung.

#### Steps for Completion

- 1. Brainstorm** - On a blank piece of paper, use three different colors of ink or marker to create a thought map:
  - Utilizing one color of ink/marker, write down specific actions, activities, strategies, moments, events, etc. that reflect the activism of women during the Civil Rights Movement, noting how their activism brought about political and social change.
  - Utilizing a different color, write down adjectives, characteristics, the emotions and feelings you infer they experienced, etc. that characterize the women and their role in the movement
  - Finally, utilizing a final color, write down your own reflections and learnings regarding women in the Movement (i.e., your thoughts, feelings, most interesting/surprising facts, etc. regarding what you have learned about the role of women in the Movement.)
- 2. Writing the Ode** – Use your brainstorming to creatively write a first draft of an ode celebrating the role of women in the Movement. Your ode should consist of at least three stanzas (no more than five) and five to seven lines of verse in each stanza. Note:
  - The odes do not have to rhyme, but they can.
  - Use descriptive, moving language that celebrates the activism and achievements of women in the Movement.
  - Remember, your Ode can be written with music in mind (they can be sung), or it can simply be a lyrical poem.
  - Be creative and have fun!
- 3. Finalize your Ode** – Work with a partner to revise and finalize your ode.
  - Read your partner’s ode and highlight what you like and the phrases, images, descriptions, etc. that are most powerful.
  - Next, consider whether there are there any parts of the ode that can be made stronger, or are confusing or need clarification. If so, discuss this with your partner. Offer alternative ideas of writing any phrase or verse that you think could be improved (i.e., alternative word choice, more or less description, specific language ideas, etc.)
- 4. Create Your Final Version** – Take your partner’s ideas and your own final thoughts and create your final version. Write or type this out. You also have the option of adding artistic decoration or images to your final draft, if it helps convey the point of the ode. Be prepared to share your final work with the class on the due date.

Due Date: : \_\_\_\_\_

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